CENTRE OF VISION

ALUMNI NUMBER

MAY, 1909

AN ADDRESS ON

"DRAWING"

DELIVERED BY

CHARLES W. ELIOT, LL.D.

PRESIDENT OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY

BEFORE THE

MASSACHUSETTS NORMAL ART SCHOOL

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

AT ITS

TWENTY-FIRST ANNUAL REUNION

BOSTON, APRIL 16th, 1909

Charles W. Eliot

1909

Graduates of the Massachusetts Normal Art School: I was much interested in what your president has been saying about the possible activities of this association for the promotion of the interests of the school to which you all feel under great obligation. It is only within a few years past that the alumni associations of the American colleges have really got to work, made effective organizations, and learned how to promote the interests of their several institutions. The Harvard Alumni Association has taken on new activities during the last ten years. I went only night before last to an effective meeting of the executive committee of the Alumni Association; and although Harvard University is over 270 years old, the conversation there about what the Harvard Alumni Association could and should do was largely new matter. They were considering what new activities they could best start. One of the things the association is now interested in is obtaining the addresses of all the living graduates and former students of Harvard University. Our number is very great when we include the students who have been in the university but have not graduated, and the printing of the first edition of the long list, both alphabetically and geographically, is estimated to cost nearly six thousand dollars; but our association thinks it a great object to make and maintain such an address list. I think this association should go and do likewise. Such a list for this school would prove a great assistance to the graduates themselves, and to all persons who are interested in knowing where competent teachers of art are to be found. Then it would enable the graduates, who are now, I understand, very much scattered over the country, to get together on occasion, just as you have got together to-night. The address list tells who are living, and where they are working, whether in Maine, California, or Illinois. Here is a plain piece of work that this association could take hold of to the great advantage, not only of the Massachusetts Normal Art School, but of many of its graduates.

But I want to speak here to-night on behalf of art education in general, in our public schools, colleges, and universities, and on the objects which such art education ought to have in view. Massachusetts, to be sure, has first recognized the need of art education, and first maintained a normal art school on state resources; but this School

has never been adequately supported, and in general, drawing, painting, and modeling have never obtained their adequate places, in either our elementary or our secondary schools, or in our colleges. The rich field is open before us, and has never been adequately cultivated. Let us consider together, therefore, the possibility of cultivating in our schools the artistic faculties, and some of the objects of that cultivation.

I suppose the first object is to provide the training of eye and hand which artistic study can give for great numbers of youth who will otherwise grow to manhood and womanhood without getting any accurate conception of good seeing and touching. Now, that falls in well with a strong tendency of education in general in our country to-day. Much more attention is now being paid than was paid fifteen years ago to the training of the senses. We have learned that the senses are not inevitably accurate in their testimony. We have learned that the senses are capable of illusions of all sorts. We know that in the arts and trades of to-day accuracy in the testimony of the eye and the working of the hand is found to be an essential element of success; and accordingly throughout our education from beginning to end, from the kindergarten through the university, more attention is being given than formerly to the training of the senses. The medical education of to-day is widely different from that of forty years ago in this respect; and in the industrial education which we are beginning to develop much higher regard is being paid to the training of the senses than used to be the case.

Now, if art education were sufficiently attended to through all our schools and in all our colleges, there would gradually grow up in American society considerable numbers of persons whose artistic sense had been somewhat trained. What would be the consequence of that improvement? The consequence would be that there would go down through the subsequent generations an inherited faculty in art, an inherited sensibility to artistic impressions, and a new capacity for enjoyment. I have personally known a mature woman who had the faculty of sketching with pencil and brush, and who took the trouble to interest her children in sketching; and now I have seen the children of these children develop the same faculty. This artistic sense and this capacity for enjoyment have been possessed already by three generations, and their lives have been greatly enriched by the possession. From that one woman started this potent stream, potent in cultivating the accurate use of the senses, potent, also, in supplying great elements of enjoyment all through life. This is the first, and perhaps the most precious result that ought to flow from the adequate development of art instruction in American schools and colleges.

The artistic faculties of human nature were neglected by our Puritan ancestors. When I was a boy and young man skill in drawing and painting, or in music, was always referred to as an accomplishment. It was not a necessary part of education. It was a frill or non-essential addition to education; and, indeed, for a young man to be musical was to encourage the supposition that he was not going to be a sensible and profitable member of society. I recall, as characteristic of Boston public opinion only sixty or seventy years ago, a case that came under my own observation, where the parents of an excellent young lady, herself having an artistic faculty, positively refused their consent to her marriage with a promising young man, on the ground that he loved music and sang tenor. It was very much so about drawing and painting. For the descendants of the Puritans they were not creditable tastes. They were not serious working faculties.

In striving to extend and improve art instruction in Massachusetts schools we thus encounter an adverse tradition and an uninformed condition of public opinion, even among educated people. We are making some progress, but we are not accomplishing enough in either schools or colleges. The adequate development of art education must await the coming of individual teaching into the public schools. A fundamental reform needed in our schools is, of course, fewer pupils before each teacher. How hopeless the conditions were in Boston a few years ago, when the regulations put fifty-six pupils before one teacher! The new school committee has bettered these conditions a little; but much, very much, remains to be done before the opportunities for individual instruction in our schools in any subject can be considered satisfactory. In schools to which drawing has been admitted the time allotted to the subject is often utterly inadequate. An hour or an hour and a half a week is considered by programme makers very liberal; but how inadequate is that time! Drawing, I had almost said, is as valuable and important a mode of expressing thoughts and making exact records as language itself. An explorer has just been telling me of his experiences when he got among savages whose language he could not speak. He got what he wanted through his power to draw. Drawing was a way of talking without a vocabulary, and of getting a new vocabulary. As a mode of recording facts and events, drawing is in many cases a much better mode of expression than language. It is often a substitute for language. The university lecturer, for example, who can draw on the blackboard rapidly, vividly, and with accuracy, saves a great many words, and the lesson he is giving is grasped much more quickly by his class than it could be from verbal descriptions.

One of the characteristics of the new education is the appeal to

the eye instead of to the ear by every teacher. To do that effectively, the teacher must know how to draw; she should know, also, something about the use of colors; and she should have some idea of shade, shadow, and perspective as means of representing solid forms. This school doubtless imparts these means of teaching to the young men and young women who are going out from it to the schools and colleges. But good teachers can effect but little unless more time is allotted to drawing in school programmes. The high school graduate who is going into a trade needs skill in drawing, and the boys and girls who are going to college need it likewise. A university student who enters on the subject of botany or zoology is really crippled unless he can draw. He will make much slower progress; and will not have the best means of recording what he sees. And yet it is only a small percentage of the young men who now come to Harvard College that have any capacity for drawing. They have never had any opportunity to acquire any artistic skill. It was just so when I was a boy. The best preparatory schools paid no attention to drawing, the use of colors, or music. I am glad to say the high schools now do much better than the schools called preparatory.

There is a class of industrial activities which should interest all who desire the larger development of artistic expression in our schools. The highly-skilled industries are making large use of the artistic faculties, and will make much larger use of them as time goes on. In so doing they effectively promote the welfare of American workmen. The curse of the mechanical industries is that there is soon no interest left in the work for the individual workman. Piece work in a factory in which almost all of the work is done by machinery is a most disheartening thing. I saw a boy the other day in one of the most interesting factories in this country punching holes through a thick steel plate of peculiar, irregular outline. The boy could not get the plate the least out of place, for he was provided with a metal frame into which to drop it. With a single movement of his arm he set the borers at work punching several holes at once in the plate. Each borer came down exactly on the spot marked for it. The boy could not go wrong. The machine contributed all the accuracy. When the holes were bored, he reversed the motion of the borers by one movement of his arm, took the plate out of its guide, or frame, put it on the shelf by his side, and put another plate into the guide frame. That was all he did all day long. I asked the superintendent how long that boy had been doing that thing; and he replied: "I am sorry to say, about a year." "How long did it take him to learn to do this?" "A day or two." The work had become automatic with that boy. There was no thought in it! No exact use of his senses! The boy himself had become an

automaton. In his daily work there was for him no fresh interest, no instructiveness, no progress.

This is an illustration of the condition of some of our great industries, particularly of those industries which obtain their results through the exactness of machines, and in which the interest of the director or proprietor is that the human beings employed should repeat a few movements until they become automatic. The tendency of an artistic industry is just the opposite of that. In an artistic industry continuous interest in the work and constant progress are possible for the working man.

The instruction given by the graduates of this school in the American world should tend towards this elevation of the industrial capacities of our people everywhere. It should tend to develop here more intellectual kinds of labor, and therefore more interesting kinds of labor. That is what this country supremely needs; for in all sorts of work the best and happiest temper possible is the artistic temper, not the temper of the ignorant and unthinking laborer, but the temper of the laborer who is in love with his work, and works skillfully towards worthy ideals. That should be an intellectual object for the people at large; and that, too, is the aim of the patriot who takes thought for the happiness of the people. It is not a rational object for this nation to export the largest possible quantity of cotton, or grain, or beef, or lumber. In the world at large this is the function of comparatively undeveloped countries, like Russia, or the South American republics, or Canada, or New Zealand. It is a great patriotic object that the national industries should have an intellectual and artistic quality, and that the country should produce and export the greatest possible quantity of articles to which skilled labor has contributed a large proportion of their value. The sentiment of the artist towards his work should inspire the workmen in all the national industries.

All your work, ladies and gentlemen, tends the right way in regard to the national industries; and you should take great satisfaction in your work because of this wholesome tendency, the tendency towards the free development of individual gifts and capacities, and the encouragement of skill, ambition, and enjoyment in work.

There is another aspect of your calling in which I think you must certainly delight. It tends to cultivate in the community at large, and in each individual who comes under your influence, the sense of beauty. That is a human faculty to which our Puritan ancestors did not attach the greatest importance. They thought a deal more about duty than they did about beauty; and they were right in putting duty first. One may be dutiful and not have a very keen and quick sense of the beau-

tiful; but the time has come when we evolved Puritans want both these excellent faculties for ourselves and all our people. God made the beautiful things in this world, and gave man the happy faculty of seeing and hearing beauty. We may differ somewhat in our definitions of beauty, or rather we are not alike in our enjoyment of all the different elements of beauty. Some people think that fitness is sufficient; some enjoy color more than anything else, others grace; some delight in lines, others in shade and shadow; but all agree that the development of the sense of beauty is a supreme object in education. All nature is full of beauty. We cannot look anywhere, except perhaps into a crowded street of uncouth buildings, without having beauty showered upon us. Yet how insensible to beauty and how indifferent to ugliness seems the largest part of our population, particularly of the native-born population! The Italians, the French, and the Germans seem to have a great deal more sense of beauty and delight in beauty than the Americans. We must learn from them; we must put into our industries the systematic cultivation of the workmen's sense of fitness and grace; we must put the study of the fine arts in our schools and colleges on a level with the study of science, philosophy, and literature.

More and more facilities for the cultivation of the sense of beauty have been brought into our cities. The museums which have been established, the parks and gardens which have been created greatly increase the means of cultivating the people's sense of beauty, even in our cities. Of course, no one who lives in the country needs to have artificial conditions created to develop the sense of beauty. Beauty is everywhere in the country or by the sea.

Your service to the community, therefore, is threefold. You train the eyes and hands of the children, and give them another means of expressing and recording what they see; you develop artistic quality in our national industries, and so promote the intellectual interests of the men and women employed in them; and you cultivate in the population at large the precious sense of beauty. Are not these worthy objects for the work of your lives?

You need to have a liberal addition made to the time spent on the artistic subjects in our educational institutions; you need a better appreciation on the part of the guardians of educational institutions of the high possibilities of art education; and you need a more general sympathy on the part of the public with your calling and with this School.